

Dreams

Grades 3-5

This lesson has been adapted from *Latino Art & Culture*, a bilingual study guide produced by the education department of the Smithsonian American Art Museum
http://americanart.si.edu/education/pdf/new_life_in_america.pdf.

Learning Standards

These standards are achieved through guided work with the teacher.

U.S. History: K-4 (from the National Center for History in the Schools)

- **Standard/Topic 3** - The History of the United States: Democratic Principles and Values and the Peoples from Many Cultures Who Contributed to Its Cultural, Economic and Political Heritage

Language Arts (from the National Council of Teachers of English)

- **N.4.** Students adjust their spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences for a variety of purposes.
- **N.9.** Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

Objectives

- To examine the story of a person from a particular culture group
- To understand how a painting can tell a story
- To distinguish fact from opinion in responses to a painting

Duration

Two 45-minute classes

Materials and Reproducibles

Make a copy of the image for students or display it on a computer screen:

- Carmen Lomas Garza, *Camas para Sueños (Beds for Dreams)*, 1985, gouache on paper, 58.4 x 44.5 cm (23 x 17 ½ in.). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Museum purchase in part through the Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program
- Handout *Fact and Opinion Worksheet*, copies for each student (or fewer if students will work in small groups)

Key Concepts

dreams, fact, opinion

Background Information for the Teacher

Artist Carmen Lomas Garza

Carmen Lomas Garza is a Chicana (Mexican American) artist who lives in San Francisco but grew up in Kingsville, a medium-size town in southern Texas. Her family history in the Americas dates back to the 1520s when Spanish ancestors on her father's side first came to Mexico from Spain. Her father was born in Nuevo Laredo just before his parents fled from the hardships of the Mexican Revolution by crossing the Rio Grande into Texas. Lomas Garza's mother's family had worked for generations in Texas as ranch hands or *vaqueros* (cowboys) and on the railroad. A great-grandfather on her mother's side walked from Michoacán, Mexico, to Kingsville to work as a chuck-wagon cook on the King Ranch.

Lomas Garza has many stories to tell about her family's rich heritage, about her memories of growing up in south Texas, and about how supportive her parents were of her desire to become an artist. In fact, *Sueños (Beds for Dreams)* is dedicated to her mother, who also wanted to be an artist:

I have a very vivid memory of what people were doing, where they were, what they were wearing, the time of day, the colors of the atmosphere, and so when I recall something, I have the whole picture in my mind. So when I'm getting ready to do a certain painting, I rely on what I already have in my mind, and then I do move some things around. I do have poetic license to make the picture be able to tell the whole story with all its details. . . . That actually is me and my sister Margie up on the roof. We could get up on the roof by climbing up on the front porch. . . . That's . . . my bedroom, actually it's the girls' bedroom. . . . My sister and I would hide there [on the roof] and . . . we also talked a lot about what it would be like to be an artist in the future because both of us wanted to be [artists]. And I dedicated this painting to my mother because she also wanted to be an artist. And she is an artist, she's a florist now, so her medium is flowers. . . . She gave us that vision of being an artist. . . . That's her making up the bed for us.

Carmen Lomas Garza, from an interview with Andrew Connors, May 1995, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The self-defining purpose behind Lomas Garza's art is to make it as easy, simple, and direct as possible. She wants the Mexican American population to see themselves in her work, recognize that fact, and celebrate their rich cultural heritage as a result. It is Lomas Garza's hope that, in this process, others will see similarities to their own cultures or differences that are interesting to them and that they are curious about. She also wants her work to educate others as to who the Mexican Americans are as a people.

Directions

Step I

Distribute the *Fact and Opinion* worksheet to small groups or individual students, as you prefer. Display the painting *Beds for Dreams* but do not tell the class the title. Ask them to think of a title and record their suggestions. Then ask students to again look closely, brainstorming words

that describe the painting, using the worksheets to record their responses. The kinds of responses you are looking for are as follows:

<i>Fact</i>	<i>Opinion</i>
2 girls	2 sisters
1 woman	their mother, or their maid
House	home of the woman and girls
Bedroom	girls' bedroom
Full moon	same
Warm season	summer, or a warm climate

Any words that describe students' emotional responses to the painting or the story they think it depicts (e.g., scary, naughty, peaceful) belong in the Opinion column. Responses may be very different from each other but all are valuable; the objective is to distinguish between what they can see and describe and how they feel about what they see.

Step II

Have students write a paragraph describing the painting, using words from the Fact list about what they see in the picture. Then have them write paragraphs or short stories about what they think is happening in the painting, using words from the Opinion list and adding their own interpretations.

By reading aloud or sharing in groups, see how many different "stories" students were able to create about the story in the painting. Compare conclusions they drew and the reasons for them.

Step III

Read aloud what the artist, Carmen Lomas Garza, said when asked about the story in the painting:

That actually is me and my sister Margie up on the roof. We could get up on the roof by climbing up on the front porch. . . . That's . . . my bedroom, actually it's the girls' bedroom. . . . My sister and I would hide there [on the roof] and . . . we also talked a lot about what it would be like to be an artist in the future because both of us wanted to be [artists]. And I dedicated this painting to my mother because she also wanted to be an artist. And she is an artist, she's a florist now, so her medium is flowers. . . . She gave us that vision of being an artist. . . . That's her making up the bed for us.

Carmen Lomas Garza, from an interview with Andrew Connors, May 1995, at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.

Step IV

Take a final look at the painting and discuss the different ideas and interpretations it generated for stories and what the artist's statement contributes to understanding it. Did students guess that

the girls were “dreamers”? If not, look again at the painting for clues. (The full moon makes the sky bright; the girls are gesturing upwards as if to hopes and dreams; the mother is taking care of the home; the house looks neat, organized, and peaceful. Note too that the moon is a traditional symbol of the feminine, of intuitions and feelings, and the possibility of personal growth.)

Extension

From the library, obtain a copy of Carmen Lomas Garza’s *Family Pictures (Cuadros de familia)*, (Children’s Book Press, 1996). In the book the artist talks about *Beds for Dreams* and several other paintings depicting her childhood memories of growing up in a traditional Mexican American community. The artwork depicts visits to grandparents, a birthday party, and other activities shared in most communities. Have students bring in and discuss photographs of these experiences in their own lives, comparing and contrasting their experiences with Carmen Lomas Garza’s.